

CANDY, from Page 8 —

Then the mail really started coming in, from all over. “We quit dropping by the airport, since the crowd got too big. So we began dropping all over West Berlin.”

After a time, Colonel Halvorsen was sent back to New York to pick up another C-54. The major networks were waiting for him, and the publicity produced a windfall. “The American Confectioners Association donated 15 tons of candy. Some was sent by ship, but most was sent through Chicopee, Mass., where school children tied the candy to parachutes. Then it was sent to Rhein-Main from Westover Air Force Base.” More candy was donated by other U.S. schools, and by people in England and Australia.

“We also dropped over East Berlin,” Colonel Halvorsen said, with a chuckle. “All my squadron was dropping.” Throughout the airlift, American fliers dropped 250,000 parachutes of candy.

A chicken and her eggs

But not every youngster was pleased

about the candy planes. Colonel Halvorsen received a letter from “Mercedes” complaining that his plane caused her chickens to stop laying. Colonel Halvorsen mailed her a big package of chocolate and gum. But he would hear from Mercedes again.

The candy bombing started on July 17, 1948, and continued through the winter and into the next summer, until the blockade ended in September 1949.

“I came back to the States on a seven-month rotation” Colonel Halvorsen said, after having stayed an extra month to keep it [the candy drops]



Photo by Airman 1st Class Eric Donner

Retired Col. Gail Halvorsen, receives a gift in the form of a miniature parachute from Rebecca Wells, a student in Katie Bowker's third-grade class at Halvorsen Elementary School during the colonel's visit to Rhein-Main Oct. 14, 2004. Colonel Halvorsen spoke to the students about his experiences during the Berlin Airlift during his visit. School officials presented Colonel Halvorsen with the plaque placed at the school when it was dedicated in his honor.

organized.” When he transferred back home, “a buddy continued the operation.”

The Candy Bomber received the Cheney Humanitarian Award and the Legion of Merit. Eventually, the lieutenant became a colonel. From 1970-74, he was commander at Tempelhof when he and his wife, Alta, accepted a persistent invitation from a Berlin couple for dinner.

“We went to the apartment house, and this couple took us upstairs. She took us to the china cabinet, took out this letter and told me to read it. It was the letter about the chickens, and it was Mercedes standing in front of me.”

Six months after his Tempelhof tour ended, Colonel Halvorsen retired from the Air Force at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, with 8,000 flying hours. He retired for the last time as assistant dean of student life at Brigham Young University. Today he has a farm and 24 grandchildren.

He’s been back to Berlin 22 times because of those two sticks of Wrigley’s gum. In 1989 he dropped 2,000 candy bars over Tempelhof from an Air Force C-130.



Photo by Senior Master Sgt. Dale Warman

Berlin resident Mercedes Wild talks about her experiences during the Berlin Airlift as German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, President Clinton and retired Air Force Col. Gail Halvorsen look on. About 8,000 people watched as Clinton and Kohl dedicated the Air Force C-17 “Spirit of Berlin” during the 50th anniversary event in 1998.



Photo by Jaime Goloyugo

The Rhein-Main Area USO honored volunteers who have given of their time at the USO office in the Air Mobility

Command Passenger Terminal at Rhein-Main during a farewell ceremony Sept. 16.

Farewell

By Airman 1st Class Eric Donner
Public Affairs

Rhein-Main Area USO officials offered thanks to more than 40 volunteers who have given thousands of hours of service to the busiest USO office in the world, tucked into a corner of the Air Mobility Command Passenger Terminal at Rhein-Main, during a farewell ceremony Sept. 16.

Volunteers are one of the most valued donations to the USO, according to the organization's Web site. More than 33,500 people in the international corps of volunteers have volunteered more than 350,000 hours of service annually.

Since 1996, volunteers at Rhein-Main have given 74,182 hours to the service of troops and families passing through "The Gateway to Europe". The office worked out of contingency boxes during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm and moved into a renovated terminal in 1992. In 2004, more than 600,000 servicemembers and their families passed through the terminal, consuming 5,200 pounds of cake and 12,500 pounds of cookies. They washed all the sweets down with 19,000 gallons of coffee.

"We know and appreciate the great work of the USO," said Col. Brad Denison, 469th Air Base Group commander, during the ceremony.

"We would like to give a special thanks to Celeste Warner Heymann - she has really given it everything she has."

Mrs. Warner Heymann, the heart and soul of the office, in



turned honored a special volunteer, Jakob Lehrian, who donated more than 3,500 hours in 2004. She refers to Mr. Lehrian as her "guardian angel".

"I stand here in my final 14 days as commander in awe at all the amazing things the USO has done," said Lt. Col Michael Polhemus, 726th Air Mobility Squadron commander.

The volunteers serve for various reasons, yet all find satisfaction in what they do, according to Airman 1st Class Samuel Sells, 469th Air Base Group Fire Department.

"Anytime we have an opportunity to help support our troops - the people who go downrange to fight for our country - I think we need to do it as a people."

"I've been here for more than 20 years - I spend my social time here," said Bettina Dahl. "I've worked with many of these people for more than 10 years - it's really sad the USO is closing."

The USO has been a welcome sight for U.S. servicemembers since before WWII. The USO is a nonprofit, congressionally charter, private organization, supported by donations of individual and by organization and corporation donations. In almost any situation - peace or war - the USO has helped servicemembers by delivering cookies, cakes, coffee or just supplying a smiling face.

The USO operates more than 120 centers around the world of which 49 are overseas in Europe, Bahrain, Bosnia, Korea and Kuwait just to name a few. With the USO in so many different places, they are visited more than 5 million times each year.

What memory will you take with you from Rhein-Main?



Ernest Zschiesche

"It's been almost 30 years since I started working here and I've enjoyed it. It has been a pleasure working with and for the Americans, because they have always been good to me."



Jürgen Wagner

"I will always remember the 24-hour operations at the auto skills center in 1994. We were the only ones in Europe doing it."



Vassilios Kapoutsis

"This was the best base in Europe. I really hate to see it go, because I have great memories and my heart bleeds to see the base leave."



Maura Braganza

"Working in personnel, meeting and getting to know many people and still having contact with a lot of them."



Celeste Warner Heymann

"Rhein-Main has made me a very strong believer that we should never fret because he will always provide. Rhein-Main has been my family since 1974."



Rudolf Schiener

"The satisfaction that we were able to meet in a coordinated effort all of the drawdown and closure activities, as well as maintaining the facilities on base and associated installations."



Ruth Campbell

"All the helpful people I've a chance to work with.
I will miss the 'Gateway to Europe' because it was the first base in Europe."

‘Gateway to Europe’ has storied past

Rhein-Main Air Base is the premier contingency airlift hub for the U.S. Air Force and has played a vital role in supporting the Global War on Terrorism and countless other airlift operations. Since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Rhein-Main has supported more than 60,000 aircraft arrivals and departures carrying more than 2.1 million passengers and over 210,000 tons of cargo.

In March 2003, the 726th Air Mobility Squadron launched 758 C-17 Globemaster IIIs, the most C-17 departures from a single base in any given month. In September 2004, the squadron processed 68,479 passengers, more than three times the combined total of the other six major U.S. Air Forces in Europe installations. The recent successes and operation levels of the base are only a small reflection of the “60 Years of Airlift Legacy” the base has supported.

The first few years of Rhein-Main’s existence as an airdrome were highlighted by the zeppelin era. Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin first used the area in 1909 as a landing site for his lighter than air dirigible Z-II. Germany had planned the site for use as one of the most important European air terminals on the continent. On July 8, 1936, the birthday of Count von Zeppelin, Rhein-Main began operations as an airport. On that day, Capt. Theodore Kist landed his Lufthansa Junkers transport on the single strip of concrete that served as Rhein-Main’s runway. The northern part of the area saw use with airplanes and the extreme southern part near Zeppelinheim served as a base for rigid airships. This area became the port for the Graf Zeppelin, its sister ship LZ-130, and until May 6, 1937, the ill-fated Hindenburg.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Marie Cassetty

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With the onset of World War II, the German Luftwaffe began to use the Rhein-Main Airport for military air operations. Luftwaffe engineers extended the single runway and erected hangars and other facilities for German military aircraft. In 1940, as the German Army massed for the drive into France, Rhein-Main provided the staging area for Luftwaffe activities on the western front. Flights of Junkers Ju-88 bombers and Messerschmitt fighters were launched from the base on sorties into enemy territory west of the Rhein river.

While the Luftwaffe retained control of Rhein-Main through 1944, the base was not used for primary combat operations. The Luftwaffe instead used the airfield as an experimental station for jet aircraft, such as the Messerschmitt Me-262. However, in 1944, with the liberation of France and the Germans falling back toward their homeland, the situation changed.



Army engineers began work on the bombed-out airfield of Rhein-Main in April 1945 and air support missions began within a few weeks.

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With the front lines only a short flight away, German tactical fighters began to operate from Rhein-Main. Allied airpower at the same time began to show an increasing interest in Rhein-Main as a strategic target in order to deny the German Army badly needed air support.

Daily bombing raids by Allied aircraft soon reduced Rhein-Main's installations and runways to a nearly unusable state, and the German occupation of the base ended in March 1945 when elements of the 10th Infantry Regiment, 5th Division, captured the base.

The U.S. 826th Engineering Aviation Battalion arrived at Rhein-Main in April 1945 and immediately began clearing rubble and reconstructing major buildings. Army engineers built new runways and extended and widened the existing runway, and in a few short weeks, air support missions were being flown from Rhein-Main. They also constructed new aprons and hardstands, as well as taxiways leading to the new Rhein-Main passenger terminal, which was completed in 1946. Air traffic into Rhein-Main increased in October 1946 when the air terminal at Orly Field, Paris, France, closed.

The attention of the world turned to Rhein-Main in June 1948, when Russians, in a calculated move, denied the Allied Powers ground or water access to Berlin. Almost immediately the gigantic Berlin Airlift began airlifting tons of food, coal



Airmen kept track of the flights and tonnage for each day for not only the record, but for competition between organizations during the Berlin Airlift. The large "Vittles" board recorded statistics for each flight as well as the delivered tonnage.

and other necessities to the isolated city. For 15 months, C-47s and C-54s winged their way to the divided city from Rhein-Main and two other U.S. bases in Western Germany. On one day alone the control tower at Rhein-Main logged 635 take-offs and landings. Maximum Effort Day in 1949 saw the delivery of 12,940 tons of precious cargo with the entire operation providing more than 2,325,000 tons of needed goods.

Over the next few years, the U.S. Air Force consolidated its activities on the southern side of the field and Rhein-Main came to be known as the "Gateway to Europe." By the late 1950s, the new aerial port was handling nearly 30,000 passengers per month. During the same period the base supported about two dozen humanitarian relief missions throughout Europe, the Middle-East and Africa.

In April 1959, within the planning framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Rhein-Main Air Base became the main supply and support base for the U.S. Air Forces in Europe (USAFE), providing air logistical support for the American military forces in Europe. The same month USAFE turned over the northern part of the base to the German government



Since the Berlin Airlift, Rhein-Main has been the main buildup point because of its airlift capability and strategic location.

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for use as a civilian airport. The Frankfurt Airport became the chief commercial airport for the greater Frankfurt area in April 1959.

Since the Berlin Airlift, maneuvers and military exercises with NATO sanction frequently used Rhein-Main as a main build-up point because of its airlift capability and strategic location. The largest exercises, Operation Big Lift in the fall of 1963, involving the airlifting of 16,000 men of the 2nd Armored Division from Texas to Rhein-Main in less than three days, and Reforger/Crested Cap in 1980, which involved the airlifting and deployment of 17,000 U.S. Army and Air Force personnel from the United States to bases and training areas in Western Europe, proved Rhein-Main's capability as a supply and support center.

By the 1980s, Rhein-Main was the U.S. military's largest cargo and passenger facility, processing more than a million passengers a year.

The base was thrust into the international spotlight again as a point of return for released hostages. On Jan. 20, 1981, two 435th Tactical Airlift Wing C-9s were dispatched to pick up the 52



On Jan. 20, 1981, Rhein-Main received worldwide attention as 52 Americans held hostage in Iran for 444 days were picked up by two C-9 Nightingales from the 435th Tactical Airlift Wing.

Americans held hostage in Iran for 444 days. They arrived to freedom at Rhein-Main the next morning. Jerry Levin, held hostage in Lebanon for more than a year, was released and flown to Rhein-Main in February 1985. In June 1985, Lebanese terrorists hijacked a TWA plane and held 39 Americans hostage for 17 days. Upon their release, they were flown to the base. Finally, in July 1986,

Father Lawrence Jenco, held hostage by terrorists, was released and flown to the base.

In early 1990, Rhein-Main functioned as a major hub for U.S. forces deploying to the Middle East for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, with 27 percent of all flights

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Rhein-Main was the major hub for U.S. forces deploying in support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the early 1990s. Nearly 250,000 troops passed through the "Gateway to Europe" during this period.



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transiting European airfields touching down here. Nearly a quarter-million troops passed through the “Gateway to Europe” on their way to the Persian Gulf. The base continued to support a variety of humanitarian operations in the 1990s, such as Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq, Provide Hope in the former Soviet Union, Restore Hope in Somalia, and Support Hope in Rwanda. The major effort, though, was in the former Yugoslavia. Rhein-Main’s C-130s carried out the longest sustained humanitarian airlift in history, Operation Provide Promise, flying into Bosnia from July 1992 to January 1996.

During the 1990’s the United States began scaling back its presence at Rhein-Main as part of the overall reduction in forces in Europe.

A December 1993 accord returned 132 hectares (326 acres) to the airport. For its part, the Frankfurt Airport agreed to pay up to 100 million Deutsche Marks for construction at Ramstein Air Base, allowing the Air Force to move its theater airlift operation from Rhein-Main.

After the last permanently stationed U.S. aircraft left Rhein-Main in the autumn of 1994, the base continued to support U.S. airlift missions in the Balkans, including support of peacekeepers in Bosnia and Operation Allied Force. The base also supported the 1999 air campaign against Yugoslavia by the NATO.

U.S.-German negotiations in 1997-1999 led to an agreement that the United States would vacate Rhein-Main by the end of 2005. The agreement signed on Dec. 23, 1999 called for the construction at Ramstein and Spangdahlem air bases that would replicate the airlift capability of Rhein-Main.

The cooperative program that translated this vision into reality was the Rhein-Main Transition Program.

The U.S. will relinquish its use of Rhein-Main and return the property to the German government who, with the Frankfurt International Airport, will again have full use of the property.

Currently, the Frankfurt International Airport plans to use the Rhein-Main property to expand its airport services with the construction of Terminal 3.

(Compiled by 1st Lt. Uriah Orland)



Photo by Staff Sgt. Marie Cassetty

(Left to right) Col. Brad Denison, 469th Air Base Group commander, retired Col. Gail Halvorsen, and Lt. Gen. Arthur Lichte, former U.S. Air Forces in Europe vice commander, share a moment during the 55th Berlin Airlift Anniversary Reunion at Rhein-Main Oct. 13, 2004.



Graphic by 1st Lt. Uriah Orland and Tech Sgt. Gary Thacker